The Top Runners' Quarterly

Newsletter of The Top Runners' Conference, The Official **Netrunner**® Players' Organization

Volume 3, Issue 3 Third Quarter, 1999

www.cyberjunkie.com/trc; www.geocities.com/SunsetStrip/Basement/9666

The One And Only Dominator

by Lukas Kautzsch, An der Roßweid 18a,
76229 Karlsruhe, Germany
<lukas.kautzsch@ptv.de>

The finals of this year's **Netrunner** World Championship are drawing near, with pairings for the first round to be announced on September 20. Technical problems and timing issues in Round 1 of the WD '99 IRC events have put us about two months behind schedule. This is unfortunate, but we decided that fun for the players was more important than quick determination of a new World Champion.

Seven finalists emerged from the Round 1 (semifinal) tournaments: David Bartholow, USA (qualified in Fort Collins, USA), Holger Janssen, GER (Karlsruhe, Germany), Jens Kreutzer, GER (Rotterdam, Netherlands), Richard Cripe, USA (New York City, USA), Byron Bailey, USA (Seattle, USA), Philip Harvey, UK (IRC Europe), Mark Applin, UK (IRC Europe). There are two finalists from the IRC Europe event because the Rotterdam tournament failed to draw the expected 14 players to qualify as a "double header". Thus the best second-place scorer from the three European events advanced to the finals instead. The IRC America event is still running and will eventually yield the eighth finalist (from the USA, Canada or Brazil).

The finals will be played completely on IRC. There will be a 3-round Sealed Deck tournament and a 3-round Unlimited Constructed tournament, running in parallel but independently. The final ranking will be determined by the total GMP score from both tournaments, with opponents' GMP total, opponents' opponents' GMP total and then AP difference as tiebreakers.

Come and watch the Finals of the 1999 **Netrunner** World Championship on IRC, EFNet (or possibly Undernet if players can't get access to EFNet), channel #netrunner!

The official rules for WD '99 as well as lists of all registered tournaments, finals matches and results can be found at the WD '99 homepage:

http://web.system.ptv.de/lk/nr/wd99.htm

If all goes well, by the end of autumn we will know who is the One and Only Dominator.

State of the Corp—September 1999

by Jennifer Clarke Wilkes
<gadget@wizards.com>

We have liftoff! The **Netrunner** *Classic* cardfile has gone through all approval stages and is now headed to prepress. We're on track for a mid-November release.

And what a long, strange trip it's been. Three years of fan devotion and butt-kicking have finally been rewarded with a whole new set of 52 cards. But we're not done yet! Now is the perfect opportunity to introduce a whole new crop of players to this wonderful game—and what better way than highly public prerelease tournaments? I'll be holding one in Seattle, of course, and I'm excited about the others that are in planning as I type this.

Sadly, since so many retailers and distributors had bad experiences with **Netrunner** in the past, there may not be a lot of stores selling the cards—at first. It's up to us to show them that ordering *Classic* is worth their while by getting great turnouts for these events. But e-commerce is the way to go these days, and Wizards will have the new cards available for purchase from its online store as of the release date. I've already pledged to spend real money (not just employee freebies) on the new cards, and I think we'll be able to sell through quickly if everyone else who said so buys as well.

I'm thinking of a green and purple Christmas.☺

Gridlock Weekend III: Netrunner *Classic* Prerelease

by Jens Kreutzer
<a2513277@smail.rrz.uni-koeln.de>

As you can see from Jennifer's article above, all of us are in for a treat this Christmas: The ever-so-long-expected second **Netrunner** expansion will be released at the end of November '99. It won't be called *Silent Impact*™ after all (but will use cards drawn mainly from the *Silent Impact* set), and it will only have 52 cards, but it's real. One of the most important goals of the TRC has been reached, and I think it's not too bold to presume that the TRC has been an important factor in these developments. So we have every reason for a little celebration, which will happen on the weekend from Nov 12-14. Since Gridlock Weekend III was on the agenda anyway, the committee has decided to make it a Prerelease tourney for the new **Netrunner** *Classic*™ expansion. This means that a couple of days before the new cards actually hit the shelves, players can get a sneak preview in a Sealed deck tourney (one v1.0 starter plus four *Classic* boosters) and keep the cards. Playing against an opponent who might be using real cards you've never seen before will be an event that hasn't occurred in more than three years of **Netrunner** history. So check out where the GW III tourney closest to your place is being held, and enjoy. More information can be found on the GW III homepage:

http://www.geocities.com/TimesSquare/Zone/5653/gridlock3.html

"Elementary, My Dear Wilson!"
Famous Netrunner Stacks
#4: Bozomatic

by Jens Kreutzer (using material by Dennis Duncan)
<a2513277@smail.rrz.uni-koeln.de>

When people start playing **Netrunner**, often the very first Runner strategy they try out is the "Clown stack". The essential and archetypal thing a Runner must do in a game of **Netrunner** is run – people have pointed out jokingly but accurately that the name of the game is **Net*runner***, not "Net-sit-on-your-butt". But running can become prohibitively expensive quickly when the Corp starts building up deep ice layers.

An obvious solution to the problem is a suite of icebreakers that pay 0 bits to break an ice subroutine, classics being Wild Card, Codecracker, and Jackhammer, among others. Richard Garfield has done an excellent job of balancing cards against one another, however, and therefore each of these 'breakers comes with a drawback: Their strength is 0, or in cases apart from the three mentioned above, at least not very high. Forward's Legacy from the *Proteus* expansion is potentially a big exception but it is priced accordingly, with a 9-bits installation cost, and not very reliable if push comes to shove. And Wild Card may truly be a killer card against weak sentries like Banpei, but paying 3 bits for each point of strength is simply unfeasible in the long run (Cinderella costs Wild Card 18 bits to break!).

Enter a card that combines ideally with these icebreakers: Clown. Since multiple Clowns generate a cumulative effect, having six or more installed makes running for free a breeze: Installed agendas are just an action away, and woe to the Corp that faces a Clown-powered virus delivery stack. Clown decks, by the way, combine excellently with cards that provide extra actions for running, such as Bodyweight™ Data Crèche or Wilson, Weeflerunner Apprentice. But for all the temptation of limitless free runs this strategy offers, it has one considerable drawback: It is slow.

A standard Clown setup requires three icebreakers, up to six Clowns, depending on the initial strength of the 'breakers, and additional memory to accomodate all of them. Often, daemon programs are used, but memory chips may take their place. The Runner also needs to get all of these cards into his or her hands and have the bits to pay for them - one Clown, at four bits, being not exactly cheap to install. Pulling all of this off within an acceptable time frame has been called "the circus act". Before all of the clowns have entered the ring for the show, however, the Corp can advance and score agendas at its leisure, once it has established some basic protection for the important forts. Chances are that the Runner won't have the bits to spend to get past substantial ice on short notice. Thus, although a standard Clown deck that does things the slow way is a viable strategy, a Corp that realizes what is happening can cruise to victory before the Runner can do anything about it.

Here, consummate deck designer Dennis Duncan enters the fray. In a consequent style unknown before his time, he maximized the speed of the "circus act", constructing a stack that throws out cards like a relentless machine. Originally, Dennis called his stack "Hyper Clown", but other players gave it the now well-known name "Bozomatic", after Bozo the Clown (a character well known in America), and "automatic". Here's how Dennis managed to cut down on time needed for the complete "circus act":

- maximize installing speed with Valu-Pak Software Bundle,
- maximize drawing speed with Jack 'n' Joe,
- dispense with bitgaining entirely by relying exclusively on Zetatech Software Installers.

Thus, his 50-card stack is almost all programs:

1	**Wizard's Book**
1	**Wrecking Ball**
1	**Forward's Legacy**
5	**Clown**
8	**Zetatech Software Installers**
2	**Joan of Arc**
1	**Emergency Self-Construct**
1	**Imp**
5	**Afreet**
2	**Succubus**
3	**Viral Pipeline**
12	**Jack 'n' Joe**
7	**Valu-Pak Software Bundle**
1	**MIT West Tier**

Dennis left the other players at the 1997 EUCON **Netrunner** tourney flabbergasted when he hit them hard with his newest creation, finishing in first place in the Constructed-Deck event. When asked to make the details available to the public afterwards, he did so and offered some advice for playing Bozomatic as well: "Ideally, you Jack 'n' Joe or draw in the first three actions, and use Valu-Pak to install five cards on the fourth action. If things go well, the eight Zetatech Software Installers provide enough bits to get everything installed without using the five bits you start the game with. The only bits you need to spend are for the MIT and the things the Corp can make you do." MIT is used for refilling the hand as a damage buffer when everything is set up to run. Depending on the luck of the draw, the whole "circus act" takes between four and nine turns. Once everything is in place, the stack delivers three Pipe counters every turn to paralyze the Corporation, which can only watch its R&D dwindle away – running is free for Bozomatic, after all, and the Viral Pipelines take care of the rest. You can substitute any Virus you like; Dennis experimented with Armageddon, but Cascade or Scaldan work as well.

Despite the awesome power of a fully unleashed Bozomatic stack, however, it is seen only occasionally in Constructed-Deck play nowadays. There are several reasons for this. Although relatively fast in comparison to conventional Clown stacks, Bozomatic still loses against speed Corp decks such as Psycho Tycho. Bozomatic is passive in the early game – it's too dangerous to do much running - but the only way for a Runner to beat Psycho Tycho is to be super-aggressive from the very start. When Bozomatic is ready at last on turn eight, Psycho Tycho has already won. As well, Bozomatic is very vulnerable against damage, meat damage in particular. Its only protection is the one Emergency Self-Construct. The vital icebreakers are present in just a single copy, and if they and the MIT end up in the trash somehow, the Clowns can go packing. Furthermore, there are some "counter" cards for the Corp that create real problems for a Bozomatic stack: Pattel Antibody and Antiquated Interface Routines effectively negate Clown's benefit, and Crystal Palace Station Grid, as well as Rasmin Bridger, circumvent free icebreaking. With no bitgainers whatsoever in the stack, the Runner has to waste actions taking bits from the bank one at a time to finance a run on a fort in the Crystal Palace. Even a single Homing Missile with strength 8 might save the Corp: Normally, the Runner expects Ice with a maximum strength of 6. Last not least: Rio de Janeiro City Grid in a huge fort can frustrate a Clown stack, as might one of the rarely-seen

Newsgroup Taunting decks. Playing with Bozomatic can bring overwhelming success, but it's always a long shot.

Cortical Scrub: By a Hare's Breadth

by Jens Kreutzer
<a2513277@smail.rrz.uni-koeln.de>
(Beginner Level)

After a long game between you and the nefarious Corp, it’s showdown time once more. Thanks to your trusty SeeYa program—which you overwrote last turn with a Clown—you are quite aware of the Corp’s plans for the next turn: putting three more advancement counters on its partially advanced Security Net Optimization to score it and win the game. Incidentally, the 3 agenda points you’d get for stealing the Optimization would be enough for you to win the game, too. You have just this one turn left to snatch that agenda, or the Corp will have bested you. Here’s what’s visible in netspace right now (all ice is rezzed unless noted otherwise, listed innermost to outermost):

Corporation
HQ: 33 bits; no agenda in hand, but any other five cards you like. Ice: Data Wall 2.0.
R&D: Ice: Cortical Scrub, Banpei, Wall of Static.
Archives: Lots of cards, but no agenda.
SDF1: Security Net Optimization with two advancement counters. Ice (all three unrezzed, but exposed with SeeYa): Any sentry, Haunting Inquisition, Data Wall 2.0.

Runner (You)
Bits: You’re broke!
Stack: 0 cards
Trash: SeeYa on top, Weather-to-Finance Pipe below it.
Hand: Clown, Zetatech Software Installer, Rabbit, Security Code WORM Chip, Weather-to-Finance Pipe.
Installed Programs: Wild Card (with a Pattel Antibody counter so it has strength –1), Clown, Codecracker, Jackhammer.
Installed Hardware: WuTech Mem Chip.
Installed Resources: 1 hidden resource, Junkyard BBS.

You have four actions left and no bits. The sentry ice on SDF1 is part of the puzzle: Choose any one you want, as long it has a strength of 3 or more, explicitly ends the run, and is not AP ice. How can you manage to grab the agenda, and what must the hidden resource be to make this possible? Remember that the Corp has lots of bits and will spend them happily to make life as hard as possible for you. Good hunting!

TRC Administrative Personnel

WotC Representative:	Jennifer Clarke Wilkes <gadget@wizards.com>
Product Contact:	Jennifer Clarke Wilkes <gadget@wizards.com>
Chair:	Doug Kaufman <Rabbismall@aol.com>
Administrative Director:	D. J. Barens <thedeej@geocities.com>
Newsletter Editor:	Jens Kreutzer <a2513277@smail.rrz.uni-koeln.de>
Secretary of Rankings:	Matthias Nagy <100642.3543@compuserve.com>
TRC Webmaster:	Scott Greig <scott@escape.ca>
Rules Librarian:	vacant
Membership Secretary:	David Nolan daffyd@worldpathnet

The Modern Corp

by Neal (a. k. a. Byron Massey)
fallguy@writeme.com

WotC sources verify that the *long*-awaited expansion, **Netrunner** *Classic*, is edited and ready for the printers. Unfortunately it will not be released until the end of the year. Still, the **Netrunner** environment is actually going to change! New cards, new combos, new deck types are all coming - just in time for Santa. Until then, what is the state of the art? Specifically, the state of the Corporation?

At the current highest level, Psycho Tycho is the hand that rocks the cradle. Every Runner must plan around it. A plan with several Rush Hours and All-Hands can defeat it soundly, though, so a cautious Corporation cannot play straight Psycho Tycho if it wants to maximize its chances for victory.

Greyhound Demolition Derby is another driving Corp. A Runner who doesn't have an Identity Donor in his or her starting hand, or an Emergency Self-Construct on the table at the end of his first turn, is likely dead. That forces the Runner to do some gymnastics for safety. But if the Runner takes either of these measures, the Demolition Derby falls flat and probably loses 0-10.

Our current philosophy is that the best Corp combines the best features of several top strategies. Being well-rounded and powerful is the key to success against the huge variety of Runner tricks, from All-Hands to Precision Bribery.

So what are the key elements in the modern Corp?

Tagging and Hurting. Some powerful and surprising ways of giving tags are very important. We like to put a couple of copies of Fetch 4.0.1 in our ice mix; it is a great alternative to Filter in the early game. Of course there are the standard Blood Cat, Manhunt, and Data Sifters. We mustn't underestimate the power of the Omniscience Foundation. Its surprise effect can lay waste to careful Runner planning. Underworld Mole is always a great card. City Surveillance is a no-brainer, and there should be one in every deck.

What do we do with a tagged Runner? With Identity Donor and Emergency Self-Construct out there, meat damage is actually not a very good option. If we must try it, the best choices are Schlaghund (going for the kill), or Solo Squad (testing the Runner's defenses). On-Call Solo Team and Corporate Headhunters are nice to throw into the agenda mix if we can manage it, replacing Solo Squad.

Beyond meat damage, two cards are surprisingly strong. Closed Accounts is a near-win card if correctly timed. And the lowly Corporate Detective Agency can wipe out Runners with great economy. Either are a good addition. We don't recommend using more than eight cards tagging and hurting. It is an effective tool, but not reliable enough to be the main focus of our deck.

Card Access. This covers everything from drawing power to rearranging ice. Annual Reviews is still the weapon of choice, very difficult for the Runner to stop. The nodes Euromarket Consortium and ESA Contract can be trashed, and require many copies in R&D to assure early installation. Employee Empowerment is a great agenda for this purpose and should be considered for every Corp. It also meshes nicely with Annual Reviews.

Off-Site Backups is essential, and perhaps one of the most powerful cards for the Corporation. Of all the cards that rearrange, swap, and move ice and installed nodes, upgrades and agendas, we can only recommend two. Lisa Blight is most useful

but sadly often ignored, and of course, Dr. Dreff is a powerful and delightful employee.

Actions. We should play with Remote Facility, a single copy of Nevinyrral, and several Edgerunner, Inc., Temps. They are all powerful. Overtime Incentives is a bad card that should nearly always be replaced by Systematic Layoffs. Management Shake-up is rarely better than Project Consultants without a very specific plan. Among the nodes we should always use the very powerful Chicago Branch, but let us not neglect Vapor Ops. It can suck up actions but we get to keep our bits regardless if things go wrong. Pacifica Regional AI and Corporate Guard Temps require highly specialized plans, and the agendas that provide extra actions are generally horrible.

Bits. We are still firmly convinced that "bits are everything". Criminal Runner Dennis Duncan (of Bozomatic fame) might disagree, but in 99% of games, the player who gets mediocre to poor tools but has a lot of bits is the winner. So what is the best way for the Corporation to generate money?

There is no substitute for Accounts Receivable - we use many of them. Credit Consolidation is usually too hard to maintain, working just about half the time against a skilled Runner. That is not reliable enough. For nodes, we recommend the popular BBS Whispering Campaign and Department of Truth Enhancement (no surprise to experienced Corporations). On the Fast Track from *Proteus* can really ruin our Corporate day, so we must place a piece of ice on our node when we install it. Braindance Campaign is nice with Government Contract. We recommend a Contract in just about every Corp; it is a strong (although specific) bit engine. Information Laundering is more chancey than Vapor Ops but also pays off better. We play with one. Remember, advancing it twice and cashing it in (if installed on a previous turn as run bait) still generates a decent bit return. ACME Savings & Loan should always be included, even if there is no Tycho/Project Consultants combo: It is a huge and beautiful source of bits.

Tricks and Defenses. In no particular order, we should use: Bizarre Encryption Scheme, Red Herrings, Obfuscated Fortress, Tesseract Fort Construction, Rio de Janeiro City Grid, Panic Button, Siren, Roving Submarine, New Galveston City Grid, Viral Breeding Ground, and TRAP! The main idea is to install a node or upgrade that requires the Runner's immediate attention.

Ice. Play with Haunting Inquisition - lots of them. It is really hard to beat this ice. Cinderella is also extrememly good since base links are being ignored by so many Runners. Beyond that, look for Nerve Labyrinth, ice such as Marionette that delivers a powerful effect cheaply, and ice that affects the Runner in surprising ways, like Asp or Ball and Chain. We have discussed a few sentries with tracing routines here, but they are not recommended overall. We should be very sure we know what we are doing before we include any ice without an "end the run" subroutine. Defense is the key.

Agenda. Variety slows down our victory but gives us more power. The key is to keep the ratio of difficulty and agenda points is as close to 1:1 as possible. That means hardly any 4-difficulty agenda worth 2 points is worthwhile (Viral Breeding Ground, Political Coup). Stick with 4-difficulty agenda worth 3 points (plus the 4-point Tycho Extension) and 3-difficulty agenda worth 2 points (and the 3-point Corporate War). Beyond that, try to get effects and abilities that will power you to victory. Corporate Downsizing is a nice agendato solve problems and gain bits. Please Don't Choke Anyone, on the other hand, is useless.

Conclusion. There is no specific deck recipe here and none is intended. When we are building our best Corporation, we must think carefully about the way our cards interact with each other. We also have to consider all the Runner plans for ruining us. In the end, we arrive at a diverse and powerful set of cards that can handle any intrusion with a minimum of difficulty.

Good Luck!

Did You Know?

Bits and Pieces from the NR Trivia Collection

#4: Proteus

by Jens Kreutzer
<a2513277@smail.rrz.uni-koeln.de>

Since September 1996, **Netrunner** has had just the one *Proteus*™ expansion, with which all of us had to be content for such a long time. But why is it called "Proteus" of all things? Sounds like Latin to me; so what has it got to do with the 'Net?

The text on the back of a *Proteus*™ booster pack gives us a hint with the statement, "Flexible new ice and icebreakers". Apparently, it weren't so much the Bad Publicity and hidden resource cards the designers considered paramount about this expansion, but the "morphing" ice and icebreaker cards, although players might have a different opinion. In this light, the name "Proteus" is very fitting, because in ancient Roman mythology, Proteus was a god famous for his astounding shape-shifting abilities. To get a taste of it, here's a quote taken from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (translated from the Latin by Mary M. Innes, Penguin Classics edition, 1955):

"There are some [...] whose shape has been changed just once, and has then remained permanently altered. Others again have power to change into several forms. Take, for instance, Proteus, the god who dwells in the sea that encircles the earth. People have seen him at one time in the shape of a young man, at another transformed into a lion; sometimes he used to appear to them as a raging wild boar, or again as a snake, which they shrank from touching; or else horns transformed him into a bull. Often he could be seen as a stone, or a tree, sometimes he presented the appearance of running water, and became a river, sometimes he was the very opposite, when he turned into fire."

It seems that Proteus has found a new abode in netspace, then. And what do you know: Recently, he has been seen morphing into sentries, code gates, and walls as well. ☺